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FOR S/GWI - AMBASSADOR MELANNE VERVEER

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: SCENESETTER FOR AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE FOR GLOBAL
WOMEN'S ISSUES VERVEER

Welcome

¶1. Coming in the wake of successful visits by President Obama and Secretary Clinton, your visit will be seen as a further sign that the Obama administration is committed to maintaining a dialogue with Turkey on both a government-to-government and people-to-people level. Secretary Clinton launched the administration's people-to-people dialogue with a March 7 nationally televised appearance on Turkey's version of "The View" hosted by four women (http://turkey.usembassy.gov/statement_030709_sc.html). President Obama then participated in a nationally televised town hall meeting with young people in Istanbul on April 7 (http://turkey.usembassy.gov/statements_040709.html). As you engage with Turkish Government and NGO leaders, we want to provide you with some essential background on the status of women in Turkey and where Turkey stands on key issues.

Status of Women in Turkey

¶2. In laying the foundations of the Turkish republic in the 1920s and 1930s, Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk rapidly improved the status of women. Women were afforded the right to vote and hold office. They achieved equal rights with men in cases of divorce, custody and inheritance. Co-education was established from primary school through university. Civil marriage was introduced and most women stopped wearing the veil. Turkey became the first country with a female Supreme Court judge.

¶3. Ataturk's reforms changed women's lives, though reality didn't always measure up to Ataturk's vision and significant differences prevailed in the status of women, particularly between urban and rural areas. Women's access to education and participation in the workforce increased steadily in urban areas. In the countryside, the change in women's status was far more modest. Over most of the 20th century the disparity between official secular/modernizing ideology ("Kemalism") on the one hand and reality among the large segment of the population that continued to adhere to tradition on the other remained outside the political arena, due to impediments against advancing political agendas that clashed with Kemalist ideology.

¶4. Over the past 10 years, Turkey implemented major reforms in the sphere of women's rights and the prevention of violence against women. The first breakthrough was the adoption of the 1998 law on the protection of the family, aimed at preventing domestic violence. This was followed by reform of the civil code in 2001, and most recently reform of the Turkish Penal Code in 2004. Through these reforms, women have attained the legal basis to exercise their rights. At the same time, tensions between proponents of secularism and traditional values have found political expression, most prominently in the governing Justice and Development Party's move to lift the ban on wearing headscarves in public buildings (including universities) in 2007 and the Constitutional Court reversal of that

decision in 2008.

Dealing with Domestic Violence

15. Despite the progress in women's rights in modern Turkey, many serious problem areas remain. Domestic violence remains accepted in many parts of Turkish society, according to academic studies and contacts in the women's rights movement. A survey conducted by Sabanci and Bogazici universities in Istanbul revealed that one-third of Turkish women have experienced some form of domestic violence. Women are susceptible to abuse in their own homes at the hands of male relatives, and this is a problem that affects women in both urban and rural areas. Among the reasons men give for abusing women are inability to bear a male child, wanting to work, leaving the home without permission and unsatisfactory cooking skills.

16. The barbaric practice of "honor killings" -- murders ostensibly committed to uphold a family's honor -- persists, particularly among people of rural background and low levels of educational attainment. According to a July 2008 Prime Ministry human rights report, approximately 1000 honor killings have been committed in Turkey over the last five years. The women's rights NGO KA-MER, which operates in Turkey's southeast, where most honor killings occur, reports that many men continue to regard acts of adultery or "promiscuous" behavior by young women as violations of family honor serious enough to justify attacks on women or even murder. In many cases, women facing the prospect of such murders commit suicide or the murders themselves are passed off as suicides.

17. Under the pressure of meeting EU reform requirements and pressed by a handful of committed women's rights NGOs, the GOT has enacted more than 30 amendments to the Turkish Penal Code to address the previously taboo topic of domestic violence by criminalizing marital rape and stiffening punishments for honor killings. Contacts, however, report that the government is still struggling to implement the new legislation. Turkish citizens are increasingly taking responsibility for protecting at-risk women as is evidenced by the growth of women's organizations over the last ten years. These organizations provide a range of services, including information on legal rights and counseling for those experiencing domestic violence. These organizations are also working with the police and local government officials to raise awareness of domestic violence and offer their services when incidents occur. The Embassy is proud to have provided assistance to such NGOs in the past and we plan to expand such support in the coming months.

Trafficking in Persons

18. The government amended its law in 2006 to increase penalties for trafficking offenses and to increase victims' rights and access to assistance. Turkey also increased its total number of trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and convictions over the last year. We continue to engage with the Government of Turkey as it focuses on additional steps needed for Turkey to get Tier 1 status, such as improving victim identification procedures, and collecting trafficking data.

Literacy, Access to Education and Employment

19. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, the literacy rate for women is 80.4 percent compared to 96 percent for men. 66 percent of women aged 25-64 have only a primary education or lower, according to the Ministry of Education. 190,000 school-aged children were un-enrolled in the 2007/08 academic year, 157,000 of whom were female. Girls account for 46 percent of secondary school students and 44 percent of university students for the 2008/09 academic year. According to the EU's 2008 accession report on Turkey, women represented 24.7 percent of the workforce in 2007. The overall employment rate for women was even lower at 22.2 percent. The NGO Kagider estimates that women's wages are on average 30-35% lower than men's and women occupy only 6 percent of senior management positions. 9 percent of members of parliament are women. Women fare somewhat better in academia. 27.5 percent of

professors are women, though only 15 percent of deans and 9 percent of university rectors are.

Women's Health

¶10. Life expectancy for Turkish women is 71 years according to the Turkish Statistical Institute. 49 percent of women use tobacco products. Use of contraceptive methods has been legal since 1965, and 64 percent of women report using some form of contraception. 27 percent of married women have had at least one induced abortion. The average birth rate for Turkish women is 2.6. The average age at which a woman marries is 19.5. There is no reproductive or sexual education at any level in the Turkish educational system. Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at <http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turkey>

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